



H.P.: A Lost Dance of the Americas | *Lynn Garafola*

In the history of American ballet, the years from 1917, when the Ballets Russes paid its last visit to the United States, to 1933, when the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo paid its first and the choreographer George Balanchine landed in New York, are usually viewed as an artistic void. To be sure, scholars have found an occasional bright spot—Americana ballets such as Adolph Bolm's *Krazy Kat* (1922) and Ruth Page's *The Flapper and the Quarterback* (1926); works of high European modernism such as Elizaveta Anderson-Ivantzova's *Les Noces* (1929) and Léonide Massine's *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1930). Still, compared to the research on early American modern dance, the paucity of writing about ballet during these years is striking. In part, this can be explained by the staying power of traditional narratives of American ballet history—above all, the idea that ballet in the United States derives almost wholly from Balanchine. However, the neglect also stems from the fact that many works of these years opened outside New York, were produced by musical organizations, received only a handful of performances, and were choreographed by women.¹ Although all performance is ephemeral, these ballets seem to be unusually so.

This was certainly the case of *H. P. (Horse Power)*, an all-but-forgotten ballet with music by Carlos Chávez (fig. 1), designs by Diego Rivera, and choreography by Catherine Littlefield (fig. 2), which opened in Philadelphia in 1932. *H. P.* shares any number of characteristics with other ballets of this pre-Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, pre-Balanchine period: the subject matter was American, the composer a modernist, and the choreographer a dancer at an early stage of her choreographic career. Moreover, like these other works it was indebted to the Ballets Russes: like *Parade* (1917), it was set in the contemporary world and conceived by important contemporary artists; like *Petrouchka* (1911) or *Le Tricorne* (1919), it melded nationalism with the exotic; and, like nearly all Ballets Russes productions, treated ballet not as a display of the *danse d'école* but as an art



fig. 1. Diego Rivera, *Portrait of Carlos Chávez*, 1932, drawing. Image courtesy of the Wiener Music and Art Library, Columbia University



fig. 2. Portrait of Catherine Littlefield, mid-1930s, photograph. New York Public Library

of expressive movement. For artists, musicians, and writers, Ballets Russes works offered a model for transforming popular traditions into the raw material of a high modernist art. Hence, Alejo Carpentier and composer Amadeo Roldan's unrealized *La rebambaramba*, depicting an Afro-Cuban carnival; the choral ballet *Sahdji* (1931), with a libretto by Alain Locke and music by William Grant Still, based on African folk materials; and *Caaporá*, an Argentine "Indigenous" work, also unrealized, with designs by the painter Alfredo González Garaño and a libretto by the writer Ricardo Güiraldes.² *H. P.* complicated this trajectory with its dual imagined communities, Americas of the North and the South, Wall Street vs. Tehuantepec, the machine vs. nature, profit vs. people. At the height of the Depression, it was a ballet in which the workers triumphed, and which looked and sounded both modern and expansively American. Here, wrote Chávez in the souvenir program, was the "grand ferment of this, our American continent."³

During the 1920s, the Mexican-born Chávez composed several ballets. His earliest efforts dated to the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution and told stories rooted in Aztec folklore. *H. P.*, by contrast, was conceived at a time of heightened musical interest in the machine aesthetic, evident in works such as Arthur Honegger's *Pacific 231* (1923), John Alden Carpenter's *Skyscrapers* (1923–24), and Sergei Prokofiev's *Le Pas d'Acier* (1925–26).⁴ Chávez wrote the last tableau first, and a fragment from it, entitled "Dance of Men and Machines," premiered at New York's Aeolian Hall in 1926 at a concert sponsored by the International Composers' Guild. "Machines," he wrote in a program note, "are disciplined energy . . . a true product of will applied to intelligence and of intelligence applied to will. In other words, they are a human product in which emo-

tion... has welded intelligence and will together." Scored for a small orchestra, the music was intended to conclude a three-part work suggesting "objectively the life of all America."⁵

In 1926 Chávez moved to New York, where he would spend nearly two years, becoming not only an important member of the city's expatriate Mexican community but also an integral part of its modern music one, second only to that of Berlin in the 1920s and a magnet for composers from all over the Americas. Chávez formed close working relationships with two remarkable women—Clare Reis, executive director of the League of Composers, and Minna Lederman, editor of *Modern Music*—both of whom actively promoted his music, and he made friends with influential critics and composers, including Henry Cowell, Paul Rosenfield, Edgard Varèse, and Aaron Copland. He grew especially close to Copland, exchanging letters with him for the next fifty years, programming his music, and inviting him to Mexico to conduct. Both had spent time in Paris in the 1920s, and although this was a formative experience for Copland, it left both convinced that their future as composers lay elsewhere. "I have just returned from Europe," Copland declared in 1931. "All you wrote about music in America awoke a responsive echo in my heart. I am through with Europe, Carlos, and I believe, as you do, that our salvation must come from ourselves and that we must fight the foreign element in America which ignores American music."⁶

Diego Rivera, the era's most prominent Mexican painter, joined the *H. P.* project early on. In 1926, he sent Chávez a "synopsis" of the ballet, with the general lines of its development emerging in conversations between the two friends. Rivera also agreed to design the sets and costumes, although it is unclear how many of the ballet's surviving sketches date to this gestational period.⁷ Much to Chávez's disappointment, the concert did not lead to a theatrical production. In 1927 his friend Agustín Lazo wrote him from Paris praising the Ballets Russes production of *Le Pas d'Acier*, while also noting its similarities with *H. P.* "The finale in the factory is perfectly achieved, both in music and in choreography.... What a shame these people have the resources to realize their things so rapidly."⁸ Another friend, José Gorostiza, advised him to contact Adolph Bolm, the former Ballets Russes star now settled in the United States, who had met Chávez in Mexico in 1921.⁹ But nothing came of this either. In 1928 Chávez returned to Mexico, where he became director of the National Conservatory and principal conductor of the Orquesta Sinfónica Mexicana.

As for Diego Rivera, the sometime Communist party member spent the late 1920s and early 1930s building a lucrative career in the United States, thanks to generous and highly publicized commissions from Rockefeller- and Ford-supported enterprises. Rockefeller money figured heavily in the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), which gave Rivera a one-man show in 1931 that brought record-breaking crowds to the young museum. The exhibition was huge, with 149 objects, including eight "portable" frescoes commissioned by the museum and painted by the artist in New York. With titles such as *Indian Warrior*, *Sugar Cane*, *Liberation of the Peon*, *Agrarian Leader Zapata*, and *The Uprising*, the majority offered what art historian Leah Dickerman has called a series of Mexican "historical snapshots," a "core set of images" from the artist's reper-

tory.¹⁰ The remaining three were inspired by New York. *Pneumatic Drilling* and *Electric Power* focused on the labor of construction (despite the Depression, the city was in the midst of a building boom), while *Frozen Assets* emphasized the city's social inequities against a background of its newest architectural icons, including Rockefeller Center and the Empire State Building. The show generated reams of publicity, with the art critic Henry McBride proclaiming Rivera "the most talked-about artist on this side of the Atlantic."¹¹ Even before the show closed, rumors spread that he would receive a much coveted Rockefeller Center commission, and within months he began work on the *Detroit Industry* fresco cycle commissioned by Edsel Ford for the Detroit Institute of Arts.¹² When the artist headed to Philadelphia to work on *H. P.*, he was at the height of his North American fame.

Frances Flynn Paine, the daughter of an American railroad executive who had grown up in Mexico, was a major catalyst for the MoMA show and a key figure in the "Mexican vogue" of the 1920s and 1930s. She received Rockefeller Foundation funding for a touring exhibition of Mexican folk art in 1928 and enjoyed the confidence of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, serving as her adviser in the purchase of Mexican art.¹³ Although Paine's focus was the visual arts, sometime in 1927 she became Chavez's manager, with the express purpose of arranging productions of his ballets.¹⁴ However, nothing came of her efforts until the summer of 1931, when she persuaded Leopold Stokowski to travel to Mexico under the auspices of the Mexican Arts Foundation, another beneficiary of Rockefeller Foundation largesse. Paine introduced the conductor to Chávez, who played some of his music for him and also introduced him to Rivera. Stokowski made tentative plans to stage one of the composer's ballets—it was only after he returned to the United States that he settled on *H. P.*—through a collaboration between the Philadelphia Orchestra, of which he was the principal conductor, and the Philadelphia Grand Opera Company. What appealed to him, Paine told Chávez, was the ballet's "international character" coupled with its exoticism.¹⁵ The day before Rivera's MoMA exhibition opened, Stokowski told Chávez that he hoped to present *H. P.* at the end of March or the beginning of April. The conductor was planning to return to Mexico around February 15 and wondered whether the two of them could travel around the country "among the Indians." Stokowski especially wanted to visit Tehuantepec on the southwest coast, a locale that would ultimately figure in the ballet.¹⁶

The score, however, was far from complete. Only the first and fourth movements were written, although Chávez had generated ideas for the second and third, both set in the Mexican "south." The second seems to have been especially troubling, and it was not until February 1932, less than two months before the ballet's premiere, that he completed the orchestration.¹⁷ Such delays were hardly uncommon in the Ballets Russes. But with Serge Diaghilev at the helm, the company had a "choreographically minded director" (in critic John Martin's phrase)¹⁸ who understood not only what professionalism in ballet entailed but also how to elicit the best from a team of sometimes inexperienced artists. A trained musician, Diaghilev had no compunction about editing a score or adding stage business to a libretto, asking for changes in casting or the design of a backdrop, or for a scene to be augmented with new dances. Stokowski may have been a

brilliant conductor and propagandist for new music, but his enthusiasm for performance far outweighed his professionalism. So long as he was dealing with experienced choreographers and designers (such as Léonide Massine and Nicholas Roerich in *The Rite of Spring*) he was fine. But in *H. P.* Stokowski was dealing not only with a new score, but also with collaborators who had never produced a ballet, including Catherine Littlefield, who had been dancing all her life. As the *New York Times* dance critic explained,

each spring, when an important choreographic work is presented by a musical organization, an epidemic of mixed emotions sweeps over the dance world. On the one hand there is the fear that the choreographer has had his hands tied; that the "powers that be" have no inclination to bother about the dancing so long as the music is given a good performance; and that in the public mind another absurd concept of modern dancing will be established. There is precedent for all these fears. On the other hand, the possibility of seeing actual productions of ballets, whether they are new or have been presented for years in Europe, arouses so much interest that against the doubts and misgivings there weighs a substantial amount of genuine gratitude that something is being done.¹⁹

Little is known about the actual process of collaboration. In January 1932 Littlefield may have gone to Mexico, although the trip is unmentioned in contemporary sources or by her biographer or any of her collaborators, including Stokowski, who made a much publicized trip there the following month to study, so he told the press, the ancient dance and music practices of the country's Indians.²⁰ In February, a version of the MoMA show, including designs for *H. P.*, opened at the Pennsylvania (now Philadelphia) Museum of Art.²¹ In late February, Rivera arrived in Philadelphia, where the scenery was built by A. Jarin Scenic Studios and the costumes executed by Van Horn & Son, the country's oldest theatrical costume firm.²² Finally, on March 4, Chávez arrived from Mexico. Twenty-seven days remained until the premiere on March 31.

The problems were daunting. Although the ballet had an idea, there was "almost no scenario, as such," "a want of plan," as critics remarked after the premiere.²³ In the souvenir program Chávez explained that he viewed the ballet as a mingling of "diverse characters and regions, North and South, in the grand ferment of this, our American continent." Rivera's vision was even vaguer: "*H. P.* is not an exposition of ideas or propaganda for or against this or that point of view, but the unfolding of plastic and musical incidents whose theme is in accord with the rhythm of our aspirations, interests, and the necessities of our social existence."²⁴ Stokowski, who believed in detailed libretti (according to one critic, the libretto for his 1931 production of *Le Pas d'Acier* was so complicated "in its argument as to defy centralization of its theme in visual patterns"),²⁵ now stepped in. The night after Chávez arrived, he and Stokowski met for what the *Public Ledger* called "their first Philadelphia consultation." Several other people were present, including Littlefield, described as "the company's premier [sic] danseuse," and Kathryn

O'Gorman Hammer (identified by her married name, Mrs. William C. Hammer), the Philadelphia Grand Opera Company's general manager (fig. 3).

The anonymous reporter devoted two paragraphs to the work that lay ahead. Although the score "had been long in Stokowski's hands," he wrote,

creation of the ballet, which aims to give the timbre and tempo of Northern modernity and Southern primitive life, has not yet occurred. That will happen in rehearsals. Contrary to all rules of the conventional ballet, Stokowski and the composer will work it out as they go along.

There is a scenario, but it is not regarded as "stiff." In whipping it into shape, by improvisation after improvisation, they hope to make of its choreographic patterns, its folk-melodic music, its setting and costume design a cross-section of American mood that will show the persistence of pre-Spanish emotional inheritance in its present-day mechanicalized [sic] civilization.²⁶



fig. 3. Frances Flynn Paine, Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, and Kathryn O'Gorman Hammer, managing director of the Philadelphia Grand Opera Company, seen in Philadelphia, March 31, 1932, where they are preparing the ballet *Horsepower* at the Metropolitan. Associated Press photo

One can only assume that Littlefield was involved in those improvisations and in whipping the scenario into shape, even if her celebrity collaborators acted as though she were invisible.

Choreographers do not spring into the world fully formed. They undergo apprenticeships, assisting more established colleagues, and if they are lucky, they find a mentor who edits their work, sharpens their skills, and sets them tasks of increasing difficulty. In Littlefield's case, the mentor was her mother, Caroline Littlefield, a remarkable woman with advanced musical training who began her theatrical career "walking on" as a ballet extra at the Philadelphia Opera and ended it as the matriarch of Philadelphia ballet. Along the way she learned about training dancers and what constituted good technique, developed a thriving school, and became a dance director. Catherine, her eldest, who danced in several Ziegfeld productions in the early 1920s, received a steady dose of Italian and Russian training,

including classes in Paris with the former Maryinsky ballerina Lubov Egorova. As Caroline (or "Mommie," as she was known) spread her wings in Philadelphia, Catherine became her ballerina. She also became her choreographic heir. By the mid-1920s Caroline was working as a "ballet director" for most of the local opera companies, even as she was producing dance numbers for movie "prologs" and a host of local theatrical events. Gradually, she began turning over assignments to Catherine. However, choreographing pageants, musical comedy numbers, or the dances in *Tannhäuser*, her first credited opera-ballet choreography, under a watchful maternal eye was a far cry from choreographing a full-scale modern work, especially a complicated one like *H. P.*²⁷

Philip L. Leidy, the secretary and counsel of the Philadelphia Grand Opera Association, who married Catherine in 1933, wrote the program notes for *H. P.* By then, Chávez's original

three scenes had grown to four, with something of a plot imposed upon them. The ballet opened with "Dance of the Man, H. P.," in which "the man, and his mechanical counterpart, H. P., represent the age of machinery. His dance, in rhythmic form, expresses the force of the machinery age which has superseded manual labor of past decades."²⁸

The second scene, "A Cargo Ship at Sea," began with a "gymnastic dance of sailors denot[ing] the vigor, activity and physical force of man untrammelled by machinery." As the ship edged south, "the regulated and well-ordered life of the sailors" succumbed to "the warmth and languor of the Tropics." Mermaids invaded the ship, followed by fish (figs. 4–5), whose dancing expressed "all the nonchalance, sensuality and seduction usually associated with the warmer climates. Finally all are swept by the intoxication of the moment and of the dance."

The third scene, "A Ship in the Tropics," opened with "the natives selling their wares and whiling away their time" dancing "their 'Zandunga,'" as "cocoa nuts" (cat. 73) and "sugar-canes" (fig. 6) joined in the "swaying and rhythm of the music": "Other fruits, represented by the 'King Banana' [cat. 74] and pineapples [cat. 75], enter and join in the dance, at the close of which, all move towards the ship as the sailors start loading their cargo of fruit for their trip to the North."

The fourth scene, "The City of Industry," depicted New York (or the "North"), "with its skyscrapers [cat. 76, fig. 7], machinery, and mechanical activities."

The workers of the world are at their toil, . . . expressing the Machinery Age by a mechanical and regulated dance. They are sullen and unruly, however, as H. P. urges them on to further efforts. An American Flapper, depicting . . . the Age of the Automobile, exerts for the moment a restraining influence. . . . Finally they revolt against the despotism of Machinery, as Capitalism, represented by a large stock ticker, becomes panic-stricken. The workers . . . open a Safe, representing the wealth of the world, out of which come finally all the Natural Resources of the earth—gold, silver, cotton [cat. 77], iron, etc., and the fruit and produce of the soil. The workers resume their toil as the sun [cat. 78] sets on a resumption of the more normal activities of Man and a return to simpler methods of labor and living.

It's hard to know which is more breathtaking—the racial essentialism, comic-book Marxism, or narrative naiveté.

The night before the premiere more than 300 members of the "musical, art and social worlds" attended the dress rehearsal. The ballet was far from ready. A reporter from the *Philadelphia Record* called it "three and a half rehearsals," since Stokowski, when he "didn't like a scene . . . made Catherine Littlefield put her dancers through their paces again and again." From the pit came "polite whistles in protest," silenced by Stokowski, who told them, "It's as hard for me as it is for you." He even took off his coat and tie.²⁹

The premiere was a major event, filling every seat in the 3,500 capacity Metropolitan Opera House despite heavy rain. Philadelphia society was out in force, and a special Pullman car



fig. 4. Diego Rivera, *Sunfish*, costume design for the ballet *H. P. (Horsepower)*, 1927, ink, watercolor, and pencil on paper. The Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller



fig. 5. Diego Rivera, *Swordfish*, costume design for the ballet *H. P. (Horsepower)*, 1927, watercolor and pencil on paper. The Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller



fig. 6. Diego Rivera, *Sugarcane*, costume design for the ballet *H. P. (Horsepower)*, 1927, watercolor on paper. The Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller



fig. 7. Diego Rivera, *Stock Market* (Stage Set — Scene 4), set design for the ballet *H.P. (Horsepower)*, 1927, watercolor on paper. The Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller

brought critics and notables from New York—Nelson Rockefeller, Otto Kahn, actress Eva La Gallienne, composer George Antheil, conductor Walter Damrosch, publisher Alfred Knopf, and representing “the modern dance” Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman. It was a “swell occasion,” wrote Robert Reiss in the *Philadelphia Record*, although he felt a “little sorry there were no representatives of the proletariat present,” given Diego Rivera’s well-known political beliefs.³⁰ The advance press had been immense, and most reviews registered disappointment. Whether because the plot was too complicated, the music too harsh, the orchestration too heavy, or the action too pantomimic, the “Mexican ballet-symphony” fell short of expectations. Although applause was generous, it lacked real enthusiasm, and many first-nighters rushed to the exits as soon as the curtain fell.³¹

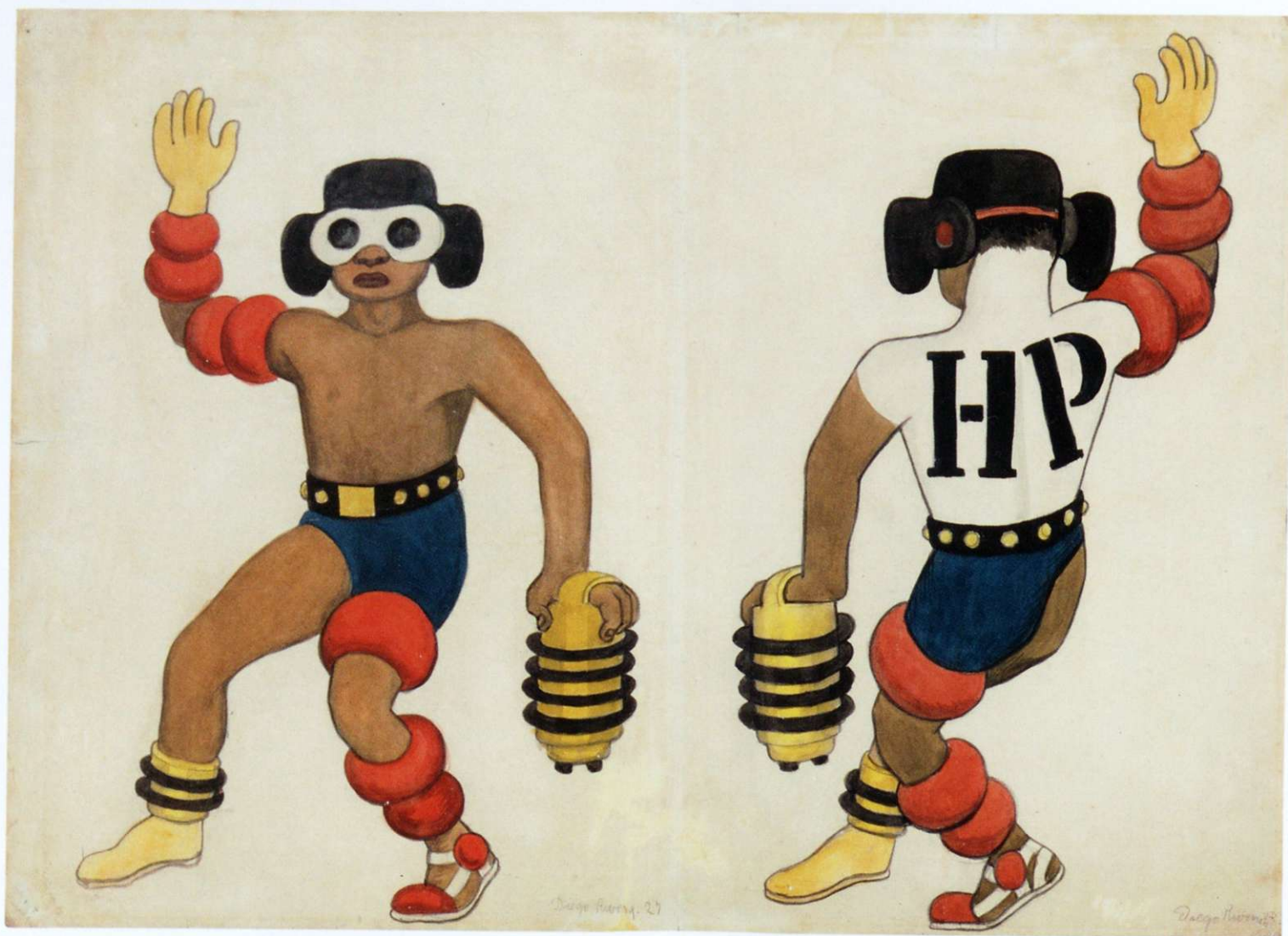
Still, there was praise for Chávez, especially his “southern” music for the third scene, which included a tango, and for the 85 dancers, especially Alexis Dolinoff in the role of H.P. (Photographs of them even appeared in New York newspapers the day after the premiere, a sign of the ballet’s importance as news.)³² Several critics commended the Philadelphia Grand Opera Company for undertaking so expensive and ambitious a production (one called the effort “titanic”) in such financially perilous times—and all for a single performance.³³ (In fact, the company



Cat. 77. Diego Rivera, *Tobacco and Cotton*, costume designs for the ballet *H. P. (Horsepower)*, 1927



Cat. 78. Diego Rivera, *Sun*, costume design for the ballet *H.P. (Horsepower)*, 1927 or 1931



Cat. 79. Diego Rivera, *The Man*, costume design for the ballet *H. P. (Horsepower)*, 1927



ended up canceling its 1932–33 season and then quietly died, a victim of the Depression.)³⁴

However, the greatest enthusiasm was for Rivera's contribution. Linton Martin in the *Philadelphia Enquirer* commended the "freshness of fantasy for the eye" and thought that the music was "chiefly auxiliary" to Rivera's costumes. "Fantasy and realism are combined in his dancing fishes and fruits, and most striking is the figure of 'H. P.' himself, chiefly nude, with 'H. P.' tattooed on his bare back, and who has a great time whirling and stamping emphatically" (cat. 79).³⁵ The letters reminded another critic of a football player.³⁶ With his welder's visor, electric coils, and white painted back that looked like a football or work shirt, H. P. was a proletarian of the North. But he was also a man of the South—nut brown, with sculptured jet-black hair. Here was a biracial being who expressed the cultural duality of the ballet's Mexican creators. The *New York Herald Tribune's*

Mary Watkins, who found the music "pretentious and empty," attributed "what color and humor... there is" to Rivera's "genius": "His fishes, mermaids, cocoanuts, sugar cane, bananas, cigars and gasoline pumps [fig. 8] provide something quite new and actually distinctive in ballet investiture and retain the qualities of sunlight and intense simplicity which always has been the secret of his success."³⁷

The *Philadelphia Ledger* critic was even more enthusiastic. "It may be said at once," he wrote, "that the most effective features of the performance were the stage settings and the costumes, which, especially in the third section, developed an atmosphere of the tropics not borne out by either the music or the choreography."³⁸ The critic also drew attention to the "extraordinary" lighting effects, especially in Scenes 1 and 4. "In The Dance of the Man 'H. P.,'" he wrote, "a clever shadow effect was used depicting the figure of the dancer enormously enlarged on a light-colored screen at the back of the stage."³⁹ This silhouette effect was almost certainly an idea of Rivera's. In 1926, when Chávez sent the scenario of *H. P.* to his friend Octavio G. Barreda, the poet urged him to confer with Rivera about the use of lighting effects.

What color here, what colors there, and not leave it to the electricians. For me this is as important as the music itself. I believe that the dynamism of HP can only be achieved with lights and music, much more so than with human movement. Therein truly lies the originality of the matter. The movement of shadows is much more rapid than human movement and much more precise and less sad.⁴⁰

fig. 8. Diego Rivera, *Gas Pump*, costume design for the ballet *H. P. (Horsepower)*, 1927, watercolor and pencil on paper. The Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller

Unsurprisingly, the clearest assessment of the choreography came from the two New York dance critics who attended the premiere—Mary Watkins of the *New York Herald Tribune* and John Martin of the *New York Times*. Watkins was unimpressed. Littlefield, she wrote, “managed to achieve a production totally inoffensive, but equally undistinguished.”

Save for the episode of the sirens, which had points of originality and humor, . . . Miss Littlefield’s chief virtue is that she avoided cluttering her scene, that she was economic and not overambitious for her troupe of none too proficient dancers. The one outstanding performance was that of Alexis Dolinoff, . . . in whom was observable immediately the trained and seasoned veteran of such companies [as] Diaghilev’s and Ida Rubinstein’s.⁴¹

In a follow-up Sunday piece she sounded a much more positive note. “[T]he dance of the Sirens who invade the ship in Scene 2,” she wrote,

is probably the most perfect realization of [Rivera’s] claim to have “dance, painting and . . . scenery . . . express the music of H.P. in plastic form,” and its perfections can be traced to Catherine Littlefield, the choreographer, as well as to the makers of music and setting. In the report of the premiere performance, the paragraph enlarging upon this . . . episode was unfortunately lost somewhere in a tangle of telegraph wires between here and Philadelphia, and thus it went without the mention which it so supremely merited.⁴²

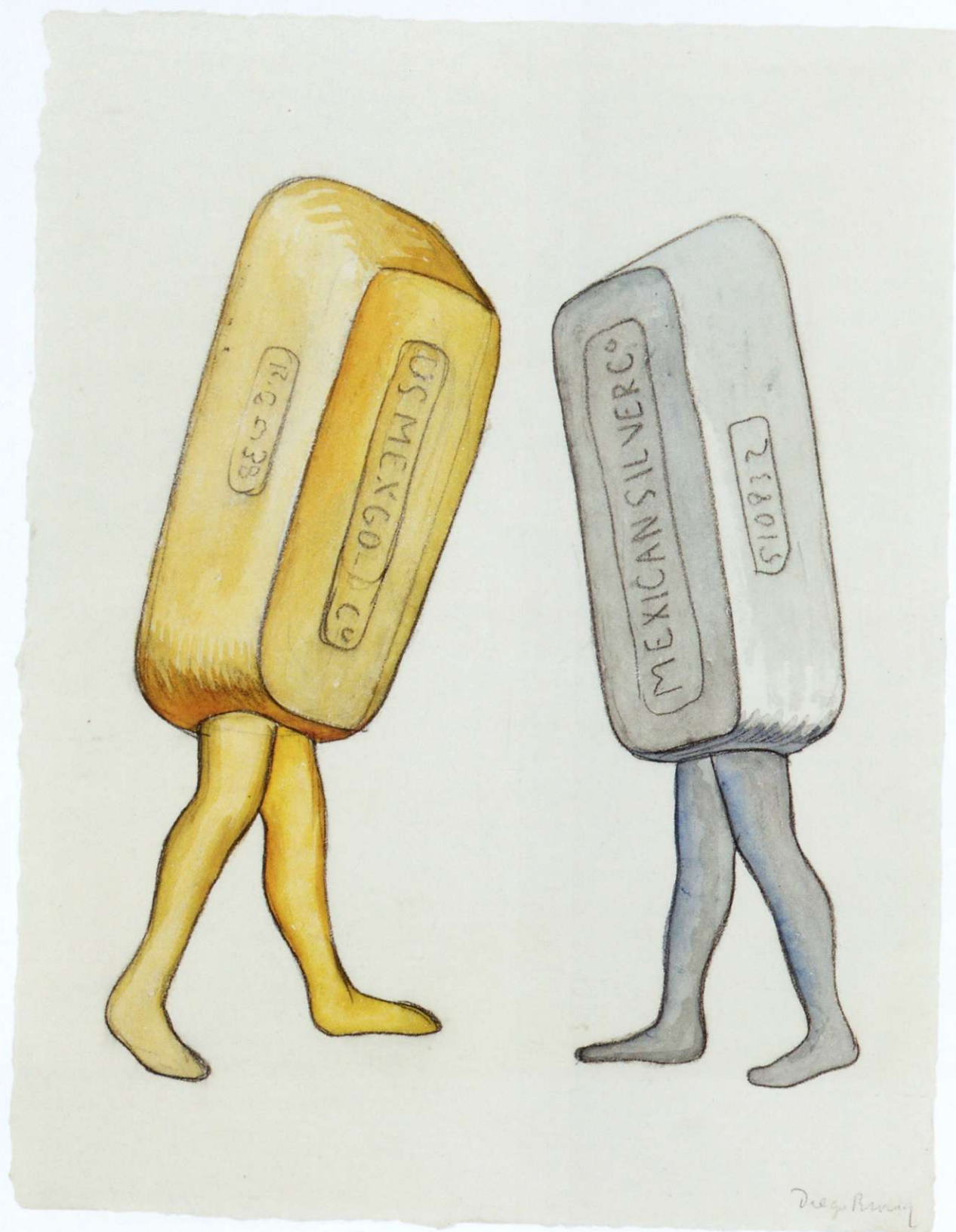
In the *New York Times* John Martin found considerably more to admire, even if he regarded the enterprise as a whole as a missed opportunity. “Indeed, it is possible to feel considerable respect if no great enthusiasm for the choreography, for once again a musician has issued a formidable challenge to a dance composer,” he wrote.

Mr. Chavez has filled his music to the brim with substance. It is endlessly contrapuntal, and in this Miss Littlefield has succeeded admirably in capturing the general musical feeling. She manages to keep as many as three or four groups active at the same time and still maintain a certain unity. It is in the simpler melodic passages that she is less fortunate. When the eye craves a sustained plastic line, it is several times allowed to go unsatisfied. Even here, however, when some of the characters are bunches of bananas, pineapples, coconuts and huge fish in papier-mâché casings, there is not much opportunity to be lyrical without a struggle.⁴³

In a later Sunday piece Martin examined the work’s missed opportunities.⁴⁴ So much was commendable, he lamented, that it was “doubly regrettable” that the production was not “thoroughly distinguished.” Chávez, for instance, had originally scored his music for a small orchestra. However, the 1932 score was for a full symphony orchestra, and this easily overpowered the dancers. Martin cited the incongruity of the opening scene, danced by H.P. “in the plenitude of his



Cat. 80. Diego Rivera, *The Siren*, costume design for the ballet *H. P. (Horsepower)*, 1927



Cat. 81. Diego Rivera, *U.S.—Mexico Gold—Silver*, costume design for the ballet *H. P. (Horsepower)*, 1927 or 1931

intellect, sentiments and physical powers," a single, slight human figure dancing a solo "while an orchestra of 114 pieces looses intricate mazes of sound." Wisely, Littlefield made no attempt to reproduce those mazes, but sought instead to approximate "their feeling by a spasmodic combination of intense and generally staccato movements, so syncopated and involved that Mr. Dolinoff needed all his rhythmic virtuosity to get through it."

Martin found much to commend in the second scene, although he felt that Littlefield did not consistently develop her material. As an example he cited the sailors' dance, which started well but ended in a "formless exhibition of acrobatics," underscored by a "ragged performance" by the sailors that "made it impossible to tell" whether they were supposed to be dancing in canon or "were merely off beat." Martin liked the moment when the sirens (cat. 80) came spilling over the edge of the ship, "delightfully costumed" and carrying guitars, "a combination," he wrote, "of mermaids and señoritas, with a touch of Waikiki." But Littlefield again failed to develop her "first-rate choreographic theme," and when the libretto called for everyone to be "swept by the frantic pleasures of the rhythm, syncopation and dance," Martin found nothing but confusion, although he admitted that the school of "superhuman" fish who invaded the ship in huge, stiff papier-mâché costumes "present[ed] a problem no dance composer could be expected to cope with."

In Scene 3 Rivera "completely" swamped the choreographer. There were fruits in abundance, all dressed in cumbersome papier-mâché costumes, accompanied by what Martin called "veritable groves of palm trees": "Though in this scene the music presents actual dance themes, orchestrated simply enough to suggest a sustained plastic line, none is forthcoming. The reason is probably that there is not room enough for any dancing of a sustained mass character. A more experienced choreographer than Miss Littlefield might have done a little better, but not much." The fault, in other words, was not Littlefield's or, at least, not Littlefield's alone. Nor was it Rivera's, argued the *Times*' art critic Edward Alden Jewell. Praising the "richness of fancy," color, and "employment of folk traditions," Jewell described the costumes as magically bringing the painted figures of Rivera's murals to three-dimensional life. He continued, without naming Littlefield: "That choreographically these elements were not made use of, were not composed, not permitted to become integral parts of a picture such as Rivera himself would construct—this was not his fault. It lay outside Rivera's allocated province."⁴⁵ The composer Marc Blitzstein, reviewing the production in *Modern Music*, was sympathetic to the theatrical problem, although he, too, never mentioned the choreographer by name. He thought the costumes were good "in their way, the way of the mummer's parade."

[E]normous papier-mâché [sic] pineapples, cocoanuts [sic], bananas and palm-trees peopled the stage, the amiable product of a child's profuse imagination. They took up so much room that the logical choreographic plan should have been modelled on the simple *défilé*; instead of which, everybody was made to dance, the Big Fish got in the way of the Grand Pineapple, and the stage was invariably messy and ugly to look at.⁴⁶

1. Suzanne Carbonneau, "Adolph Bolm in America," in *The Ballets Russes and Its World*, ed. Lynn Garafola and Nancy Van Norman Baer (New Haven, 1999), 219–44; Suzanne Carbonneau Levy, "The Russians Are Coming: Russian Dancers in the United States," Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1990, ch. 6; Lawrence Sullivan, "Les Noces: The American Premiere," *Dance Research Journal* 14, nos. 1–2 (1981–82): 3–14; Shelley C. Berg, "Le Sacre du printemps": *Seven Productions from Nijinsky to Martha Graham* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1988), ch. 5. Levy's unpublished dissertation, focusing on Russian dancers who worked in the United States from the 1910s to the early 1930s, is one of the very few studies focusing on ballet during this period, viewing it across genres and especially in tandem with popular culture. Another, albeit more limited in scope, is Dawn Lille Horowitz's "Michel Fokine in America, 1919–1942," Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1982. More recently, Carrie Gaiser Casey in "Ballet's Feminisms: Genealogy and Gender in Twentieth-Century American Ballet," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2009, has focused on the careers of Anna Pavlova, Albertina Rasch, and Rosina Galli, all active as dancers, choreographers, and company directors in the early twentieth century. Andrea Harris in "Aesthetic Dissidence: Feminist Ballet Historiography and the Boundaries of the Classical," Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2005, offers a feminist critique of received ballet historiography that rests in part on the career of Ruth Page. Page has also been the subject of several recent articles by Joellen Meglin. See, for example, "Choreographing Identities Beyond Boundaries: *La Guirlandes* and Ruth Page's Excursions into World Dance," *Dance Chronicle* 30, no. 3 (2007): 439–69; "Blurring the Boundaries of Genre, Gender, and Geopolitics: Ruth Page and Harald Kreutzberg's Transatlantic Collaboration in the 1930s," *Dance Research Journal*, 41, no. 2 (Winter 2009): 52–75; and "Victory Garden: Ruth Page's Danced Poems in the Time of World War II," *Dance Research* 30, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 22–56.
2. Lester Tomé, "Envisioning a Cuban Ballet: Afro-cubanismo, Nationalism and Political Commentary in Alejo Carpentier and Amadeo Roldán's *La rebambaramba* 1928," *Dance Research Journal of Korea* 71, no. 5 (2013): 2–25; Charles Molesworth, "In Search of *Sahdji*: Alain Locke and the Making of an African-American Ballet," *The Berlin Journal*, no. 12 (Spring 2006): 56–59; Leonard Harris and Charles Molesworth, *Alain L. Locke: Biography of a Philosopher* (Chicago, 2008), 251–58; Victoria Phillips Geduld, "*Sahdji*, an African Ballet (1931): Queer Connections and the 'Myth of the Solitary Genius,'" *CORD 2008 Conference Proceedings*, 95–105; Michelle Clayton, "Modernism's Moving Bodies," paper delivered at the Columbia University seminar Studies in Dance, 21 Apr. 2014, 13–17; María Elena Babino, *Ricardo Güiraldes y su vínculo con el arte: Buenos Aires, París, Mallorca, un itinerario estético para un proyecto americanista* (San Martín, 2007), and *Caaporá: Un ballet indígena en la modernidad* (Buenos Aires, 2010). For an overview of ideas about the aesthetic of pre-Hispanic recovery, see Rodrigo Gutiérrez Viñuales, "Recuperación prehispánica en la contemporaneidad: tradición, vanguardia y fortuna crítica," *Revista de Historiografía* 19, no. 10 (2/2013): 88–100.
3. *H. P. souvenir* program, quoted in Christina Taylor Gibson, "The Music of Manuel M. Ponce, Julián Carrillo, and Carlos Chávez in New York, 1925–1932," Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 2008, 190.
4. Gibson 2008, 198. For Chávez's early years in New York, see ch. 5.
5. Program, International Composers' Guild, Aeolian Hall, 28 Nov. 1926, M-CLP (Chavez, Carlos), Music Division, New York Public Library (hereafter MD-NYPL). For the manuscript score signed by the composer and dated 1926, see JON 84–11 no. 97k, MD-NYPL.
6. Letter to Carlos Chávez, 26 Dec. [1931]. JOB 93–4, Correspondence and Scores Belonging to Carlos Chavez, 1907–79, Folder 12, MD-NYPL.
7. Diego Rivera to Carlos Chávez [1926], and accompanying note, *Epistolario selecto de Carlos Chávez*, ed. Gloria Carmona (Mexico City, 1989), 66. See also Octavio G. Barreda to Carlos Chávez, 27 Aug. 1926, *ibid.*, 69. The Museum of Modern Art, which owns the most complete set of Rivera's designs, dates about half to 1927 and identifies the remainder as being made in 1927 or

1931. The images are online at http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist_id=4942.

8. Agustín Lazo to Carlos Chávez, 10 June 1927, Carmona 1989, 76.

9. José Gorostiza to Carlos Chávez, 4 July [1927], and accompanying note, Carmona 1989, 77–78. In his effort to get *H. P.* and his other ballets produced, Chávez also contacted Irene Lewisohn of the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York City and Eugene Goossens, the conductor of the first English concert performance of *The Rite of Spring* now associated with the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York.

10. Leah Dickerman, "Leftist Circuits," in Leah Dickerman and Anna Indych-López, *Diego Rivera: Murals for the Museum of Modern Art* [exh. cat., Museum of Modern Art] (New York, 2011), 28. See pages 31–36 for the New York panels.

11. The show, which opened to the public on December 23 and closed five weeks later, received generous coverage both in the *New York Times* (hereafter *NYT*) and the *New York Herald Tribune* (hereafter *NYHT*). For McBride, see "Diego Rivera Exhibition in New York," *The Sun*, 3 Jan. 1932, A57.

12. Edward Alden Jewell, "Two Corners Are Turned: Metropolitan's New Director—The Museum of Modern Art—Murals for Radio City," *NYT*, 24 Jan. 1932, X12. Rivera was eventually commissioned to paint *Man at the Crossroads*, the grand mural at 30 Rockefeller Plaza (the RCA Building) that would be chiseled away because of its overt display of political radicalism and because it depicted John D. Rockefeller, Jr., a temperance advocate, swilling cocktails (Dickerman 2011, 40). Some of the Rockefeller Center material was absorbed into the mural series *Portrait of America*, painted by Rivera at the New Workers School, 51 West 14th Street in New York City, founded by the oppositionist Communist leader Jay Lovestone.

13. Dickerman 2011, 21–22. For the various exhibitions of Mexican art in the United States in the 1920s, see Jodi Roberts, "Selected Chronology," in Dickerman and Anna Indych-López 2011, 138–43; for the relationship between Mexican muralism and Americanist modernism, see Edward Lybeer, "Transnational Modernisms: The United States, Mexico, and the Idea

of America," Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 2011, 100–121.

14. Gibson 2008, 165–66.

15. Ibid., 180–81. See, also, Oliver Daniel, *Stokowski: A Counterpoint of View* (New York, 1982), 279.

16. Stokowski to Chávez, 24 Nov. 1931, in Carmona 1989, 127.

17. Gibson 2008, 181–82.

18. John Martin, "The Dance: A Handicap Event," *NYT*, 10 Apr. 1932, X11.

19. John Martin, "The Dance: A Mexican Ballet," *NYT*, 27 Mar. 1932, X11.

20. For Littlefield's possible trip to Mexico, see Gibson 2008, 197. Unfortunately, she does not support this with evidence. Nancy Brooks Schmitz's "A Profile of Catherine Littlefield," Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1986, is the fullest discussion of the choreographer's life and career. For Stokowski's trip, see Gibson 2008, 183.

21. Roberts 2011, 141; Gibson 2008, 183.

22. "Gasoline Pumps to Dance in Stokowski Ballet 'H.P.,'" *NYHT*, 26 Feb. 1932, 11. On his arrival Rivera was photographed with Frances Flynn Paine, his wife Frida Kahlo, and Kathryn O'Gorman Hammer (or Mrs. William C. Hammer, as she was usually referred to), the general manager of the Philadelphia Grand Opera Company, by the Associated Press. See Dickerman and Indych-López 2011, 140. For Van Horn & Son, see Roland W. Van Horn, *Our First Hundred Years: The Story of America's Oldest Theatrical Costume Firm, 1852–1952* (Philadelphia, 1952).

23. Mary Watkins, "Current Events in the Dance World," *NYHT*, 10 Apr. 1932, F9; Paul Rosenfeld, "American Premieres," *The New Republic*, 20 Apr. 1932, 274.

24. Quoted in Gibson 2008, 191.

25. John Martin, "The Dance: Modernism," *NYT*, 26 Apr. 1931, X3. The libretto was by the designer Lee Simonson and the choreography by Edwin Strawbridge, who played one of the efficiency experts. (Yeichi Nimura played the other.) The dancers came from Strawbridge's own dance group as well as the dance

groups of Martha Graham and Elsa Findlay. See Mary F. Watkins, "Annual Spring Production by League of Composers With Philadelphia Orchestra Is Big Dance Event," *NYHT*, 19 Apr. 1931, G10; John Martin, "The Dance: Social Satire," *NYT*, 19 Apr. 1931, 109. Pauline Koner, who danced in the production, wrote in her memoirs that "the scenario was so complicated that I was never quite able to understand it" (*Solitary Song* [Durham, 1989], 50).

26. "Stokowski Opens 'Parley' on Ballet. Chavez, Mexican Composer, Arrives to Work Out Details of 'H.P.' With Conductor," *Public Ledger*, 5 Mar. 1932, JPB 06-15, Philadelphia Grand Opera Records, 1923-32, Box 1, Folder 2, MD-NYPL (hereafter Grand Opera Records).

27. Schmitz, "A Profile of Catherine Littlefield," chs. 2-3; Ann Barzel, "The Littlefields," *Dance Magazine*, May 1945, 10-11. For a list, with credits, of the operas presented in Philadelphia during this period, see "Opera in Philadelphia: Performance Chronology 1925-1949," compiled by Frank Hamilton, 2009, <http://hamilton.franco-corelli.nl/ph/ph1.pdf>. Between 1925 and 1932 Caroline was at various times the dance director of the Philadelphia Civic Opera, Philadelphia La Scala Opera Company, and the Philadelphia Grand Opera Company. The *Tannhäuser* production for which Catherine first received choreographic credit took place at the Philadelphia Grand Opera Company on 16 April 1931. Even apart from Littlefield, a number of women choreographed for Philadelphia's opera companies during the 1920s and early 1930s, including Florence Cowanova, Mary Bernadette Kerns, Anna Duncan, and Louise Le Gai.

28. Philip L. Leidy, "Story of the Opera and Ballet. 'H.P.' By Carlos Chavez and Diego Rivera," playbill, Philadelphia Grand Opera Association, 31 Mar. 1932, *MGZB Programs (Littlefield, Catherine), Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library (hereafter JRDD-NYPL). The following quotations are from this program as well.

29. "Stokowski in Shirt Sleeves Whips H.P. Ballet in Shape," *Philadelphia Record*, 31 Mar. 1932, Grand Opera Records, MD-NYPL.

30. Robert Reiss, "'H.P.' Presentation Is Swell Occasion, But Lacks Timely Proletarian Touch," *Philadelphia*

Record, 1 Apr. 1932, Grand Opera Records, MD-NYPL. For the theater's seating capacity, see "Chavez Ballet is Whimsy of Machine Age," *The Chicago Daily News*, 31 Mar. 1932, "MGZR Clippings" ("H.P.") [Littlefield, C.], JRDD-NYPL.

31. Henry C. Beck, "'H.P.' Makes Premiere Here With a Bang As Sparkplugs Go Into a Song and Dance," *Philadelphia Record*, 1 Apr. 1932, Grand Opera Records, MD-NYPL. See, also, the other reviews in this collection.

32. Martin, "A Handicap Event," 1932. Martin added that this was "without precedent in the five years of the dance revival's greatest intensity. Not even the first production of a ballet in the Library of Congress—and that a ballet commissioned to be written especially for the occasion by Stravinsky—achieved that prominence," a reference to the premiere of *Apollon Musagète* in 1928.

33. L. H. H., "Ballet 'H.P.' Makes Startling Debut in Philadelphia," *Main Line Daily*, 1 Apr. 1932, Grand Opera Records, MD-NYPL.

34. Schmitz, "A Profile of Catherine Littlefield," 55-56; "Opera Suspended in Philadelphia," *NYT*, 2 Oct. 1932, 37.

35. Linton Martin, "'H.P.' New Ballet Fantastic Affair," *The Philadelphia Enquirer*, 1 Apr. 1932, Grand Opera Records, MD-NYPL.

36. "Chokopul's Travels," *Time*, 11 Apr. 1932, 30.

37. Mary Watkins, "Chávez's Ballet, 'H.P.' Has Debut in Philadelphia," *NYHT*, 1 Apr. 1932, 9.

38. S. L. L., "Ballet 'H.P.' Given World Premiere," *The Philadelphia Ledger*, 1 Apr. 1932, Grand Opera Records, MD-NYPL.

39. Ibid. The anonymous reviewer for *The Christian Science Monitor* made a similar point ("Carlos Chavez's Mexican Ballet," 9 Apr. 1932, 6).

40. Octavio G. Barreda to Carlos Chávez, 27 Aug. 1926, in Carmona 1989, 69.

41. Watkins, "Chávez' Ballet," 1932. Dolinoff danced in the Anna Pavlova and Ida Rubinstein companies and various Paris-based troupes. Littlefield, who met him at Egorova's studio, occasionally took class with him. He was never a member of the Diaghilev company. See Amanda Smith, interview with Alexis Dolinoff, 17 Apr. 1979, *MGZMT 5-670, JRDD-NYPL.

42. Watkins, "Current Events," 1932.
43. John Martin, "Mexican Ballet in World Premiere," *NYT*, 1 Apr. 1932, 16.
44. Martin, "A Handicap Event," 1932.
45. E[dward] A[lden] J[ewell], "Mural Artists A-Tiptoe," *NYT*, 10 Apr. 1932, X10.
46. Marc Blitzstein, "Music and Theatre—1932," *Modern Music*, 9, no. 4 (May–June 1932): 166.
47. Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York, 1983), 132.
48. This is suggested in Henry C. Beck's review ("‘H. P.’ Makes Premiere Here"), "The brown-skinned women swirl their ‘Zanduga,’ the music of which invites participation of pineapples, as well as other fruits, led by a garish King Banana."
49. Blitzstein, "Music and Theatre," 1932, 164.
50. Martin, "‘H. P.’ New Ballet Fantastic Affair," 1932.
51. Gibson 2008, 175.
52. Diego Rivera, with Gladys March, *My Art, My Life: An Autobiography* (New York, 1960; repr. ed., New York, 1991), 95; "Art Preview Opens Dance Exposition," *NYT*, 29 Nov. 1937, 25; E[dward] A[lden] J[ewell], "Art and the Dance," *NYT*, 3 Dec. 1937, 26; Warren A. M'Neill, "Festival Steals Art Spotlight," *The Sun*, 5 Dec. 1937, 72.